773
286 Seventeen days after the apprenticeship the old woman died. Her companions continued to spin but since they did not work on wood (1), they had to ask the men to carve spindles, thus revealing

[412] 1. Except for cooking, a woman never uses a knife, an object reserved for men.

their secret.

Some time after this the spirit sent a spider to weave its web at the opening of one of the underground holes used for habitation (see Fig. 6), where lived a man called Bambou Diara. The latter watched the insect and they called in his friend, Kari Mariko. They wished to imitate the web by using the spider's thread which, however, proved too fragile to work with. They then asked the women for their cotton threads. Holding a twig of straw on which he had wound the thread, and having secured the warp, as had the insect, to the two rocks protecting the entrance, Bambou imitated the spider and made a kind of round fan, shaped like the web with coarse loops. When he had woven two, he joined them with a rope made of nyama bark, thus obtaining the first loincloth (mbogo nimba).

Kari Mariko had watched the work and had noticed the difficulty with which his friend threaded the woof through the warp. He got the idea of winding the thread on a thin stick more resistant than the straw and of placing this in a stone trough which would slide easily between the elements of the warp. This was the first shuttle (kuruni). He wound the thread on it in three bobbins, the symbol of masculinity, thus consecrating weaving as man's work. The threads were then stretched horizontally and the shuttle was used vertically, thus cutting across the warp each time it went up or down (Fig. 6).

All came to see the work of the two artisans and named the village where they lived the "village of intelligence, hakilidugu." They learned from them the art of weaving and today the names of the two friends are still invoked over the plate of food which each apprentice must eat before beginning his instruction.

Following the breaking of a taboo in the course of a fishing expedition on the river, the spindle whorls ceased to fall from the sky. Since then, fishermen /105/ produce them by mixing clay with karite oil and drying them in the sun.

564 Every blacksmith is regarded as the holder of an excellent tere.
326 He is well-intentioned, affable, and never hurts anyone. It is easy
774 to make friends with him, to joke with him, even if one knows him but a short time. The senankuya relationships which he has with other Blacks also contribute to the cordiality of these ties.

[304] The good tere of the blacksmith is brought into play particularly at circumcision which is preferably entrusted to a Gwonna. Being circumcised by a blacksmith causes the wanzo to diminish rapidly, hastens the healing, and improves the tere. A blacksmith is reputed to have the power of transforming himself at will into an animal or a plant. In those places where hyenas are venerated as the animal [825] protectors of a village (dasiri), they are always considered as the blacksmith's ancestors who have undergone metamorphosis. (1).

1. Particularly in the village of Konodimi, situated 21 km. to the southwest of Ségou.

773 The ritual paraphernalia now preserved in each village comprise
564 models of all the tools manufactured by the blacksmiths since their
326 first appearance.
412 a. Wooden tools The craftsmen first used wood, gradually changing the shape of the objects. From a simple stick /116/ (generally in sunzun) (2) or from a rough-hewn block, they gradually made more

2. Diospyros mespiliformis. The wood of this tree is very hard.

perfect tools, obtaining the shape desired by rubbing and polishing on rocks.

773 The first weapon used in hunting was a throwing instrument in the
564 shape of a boar-spear, the semenkala (from kala, handle, Fig. 9, A).
326 Hewn from one piece, it comprised three distinct parts: (1) the
411 bulonda; (2) the semenu; and (3) the koli (literally, hook). Men threw the object with all their strength at the pursued animal or else they dug into the earth where their prey was hiding with the pointed end (semena) which was often poisoned with a viper's venom. The weapon was the object of blood sacrifices carried out on the koli and destined to increase its strength.

773 564 324 41 [T2]

The first agricultural tool was the yirewolo (literally, noble, Fig. 9, B), thus named because of its antiquity, mogokoroba (literally, old person, ancestor).

b. Stone tools Later, craftsmen learned to use stone. They used neolithic axes called "thunder stones" (1) which were used as scissors.

> 1. The Bambara, like other Blacks of the Sudan, attributed divine origin to certain neolithic axes (see p. 71. It would seem that a great many primitive tools had been found by them in the area at the time of their arrival.

Those of the Gwondougou were at all times famous for their solidity. The craftsmen worked together and when they had rough-hewn their models, certain individuals among them were delegated to sharpen these by rubbing them on a rock.

The farakun (literally, stone head) (Fig. 9, D) was the first axe the handle of which was invented by an artisan who, having poisoned the sharp edge of his tool, wished to try it out on a tree. He sank the stone into a young tree trunk with the idea that the leaves would dry up of themselves. But he died without having ascertained the result. Later a passerby, having tried in vain to remove the stone from the tree, cut the wood above and below it, and in handling this new tool, was surprised at its efficiency. The use of the hafted axe spread among men who utilized the fiber of the nyama to tie the stone to the wood. In addition, the stone could be separated quickly from the handle and used as a knife to cut meat or bones. The handle was used as a pointed stick with which to dig in the ground and to attack animals.

It is probable that hafting was also applied to wooden hoes made in two sections and used /117/ for a long time in areas where there was no hard stone. In fact, a myth concerning the discovery of the cultivation of cotton, which preceded that of cereal grains, mentions the fact that men used to take their handles home, but left the ends of their hoes at the crossroads each day in honor of the local spirit.

c. Iron tools Finally, the Gwonna discovered iron and developed the science of metallurgy (2).

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2. The Blacks consider that the discovery of iron and metallurgy are due to the Gwonna. It is, however, not impossible that this technology was imported by craftsmen who came from the Mediterranean.

At a time when the men had left the village of Gwondougou, taking their altars with them, two girls left their home and went to live with two artisans of the Fané and Koumaré families.

[532]

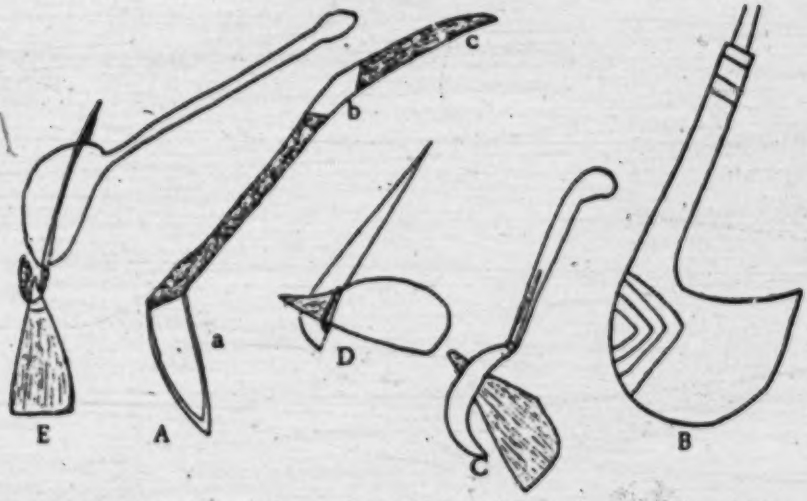

Fig. 9 —Weapons and tools of wood (A and B), of stone (C and D), of iron (E) of the ancient Bambara. (Drawing by an informant).

When the men returned to the village to get some hard stone which they would like to use, they were very much troubled not to find their girls. They dug the ground to search for them, thinking that they had been buried, since men in those days lived in laid-out underground holes. In the course of this work they discovered some rocks which were hitherto unknown to them and which are called farabele. The men thought these rocks beautiful and wished to use them. When placed in fire they were changed and became so hard /118/ that the hammers with which the men attempted to shape them split. The pieces of iron were then used as projectiles to replace the stones of the slings. But the blacksmiths, who had abducted the young girls and who had returned to the village with their wives, saw the new substance and suggested the idea of making axes out of it.

773 564 326 412 The first forged tool, the kongobwona (literally, to abandon hunger), is still used by blacksmiths today as a ritual axe (Fig. 9, E).

It is made up of a wooden handle terminating in an enlargement which forms its bulk, and pierced by a bent iron rod which in turn holds the cutting edge (farabye) of the axe proper. The handle is very long, allowing the man to work without bending over.

The tool justifies its name for it brought prosperity to the craftsmen. The symbolism of the different sections shows this: the enlarged part of the consecrated model, which each blacksmith keeps on his altar and which is the object of regular rituals, is hollowed out and holds money, millet, and copper. The iron rod which pierces it represents at its lower extremity the tongue of the oldest of the Gwonna, and at its upper extremity that of the youngest, thus recalling the actions and the words of those who discovered the metal for the benefit of all.

Later, blacksmiths manufactured other models of iron axes and hoes, copying those previously used, but reducing their size.

Each day the end piece of the wooden hoes was abandoned at the crossroads after they had been used in honor of the local spirit. The worker kept only the handle and carved a new tool for the following day. The handles of hoes and axes were considered to be people because they were impregnated with the vital force of those who held them. The farmer left the cutting edge (of stone or iron) in his field and brought home the handle which he placed on his mat at night.

[782] Weapons and tools were the objects of regular sacrifices. The handle was removed and the blood of victims would flow first into the hole used to secure it, then on the cutting edge, while the officiating person recited a prayer.

773 564 326 412 778 Today, the assemblages of ancient tools are called makorobaw ka minew (literally, tools of the great ancestor). Considered as the most respectable and precious /119/ testimony of their civilization, models of each object are kept in sanctuaries called makoroba so (literally, house of the ancestors) which are generally natural caves or holes dug in the ground, reminiscent of primitive habitations. These tools are identified with the ancestors who used them and who were, long before the organization of religious societies, the object of a regular cult. That is why, in deference to this fundamental hierarchy, they are presented to the circumcised in front of the family altars (1) at the time of the initiation of the Komo. Similarly, they

1. Particularly in the village of Konodimini in the Ségou region.

773 564 326 412 778 are removed from the sanctuaries, honored, and replaced before the Komo altars during the agricultural and funerary rituals; to fail to observe this rule would constitute the breaking of a taboo and entail the most serious disorders.

In the course of the annual ceremony consecrating the dead, these tools are carried to the cemetery and receive as many victims as do the dead, for they represent the ancestors.

The kotigi brings them to the same place on two other occasions: during the agricultural ceremonies carried on after the growth of the ear of corn and after threshing the harvest. Axes and hoes are presented one by one at the tombs of the dead and then, reunited in the center of the cemetery, each of them is used once to cut a branch or to dig the soil. This ritual gesture recalls the use which the ancestors made of them.

The Forge

326 826 The blacksmith establishes his workshop under a shed, usually located in one of the squares or at the entrance to the village. It is the simplest of its kind and involves a minimum of equipment. The forge represents the craftsman: the furnace his body, the bellows his testicles, the blast pipe his penis, the fire his head. When the red hot metal is beaten with the hammer, a replica of the gosilande, which symbolizes the universe, the sparks are the lightning and thunder bolts.

326 778 The altar of the forge, sometimes situated to the west of the hearth, contains blackened hoe, pickaxe and axe handles, coal (fininkoro, literally, old coal) ashes kneaded with clay (buguri, literally, ashes of the hearth), all of which belonged to former owners, and finally an axe kongobwona called "mother of the altar," a smaller replica of the ancestral axes.

The bulk of the wood which holds the iron hooks and the blade /120/ is hollowed out and forms a kind of storage divided into three compartments.

The upper one contains money so that whatever happens, the blacksmith will have means to live.

In the central compartment are placed copper and iron, metals which the blacksmith works, as well as water, basic element and preferred seat of Faro, master of the word.

787 surrounded by several others, this designates a powerful master surrounded by his proteges and promises aid. If one cowrie is stuck perpendicularly in another, that pattern is called "little girl in the gourd" and presages the birth of a girl. If two cowries are close together and turned in opposite directions, this is the symbol of sexual intercourse and presages the success of a love affair.

The kola nut is used as often as the chicken for divinatory offering. Here is how the method operates with respect to the nyana dugu-da-siri, of which we shall soon speak. After separating the nut into its two parts, the officiant brings them together again between his thumb and index finger and touches the ground with them, while asking the nyana to make known whether the offering is accepted. Then from a point not far off the ground, he casts the nut against, or a little in front of, that which is supposed to be the seat of the nyana. If the two parts both turn toward the officiant on the sides which were formerly in contact, the reply is favorable.

The officiant then repeats the proceedings in order to find out if the nyana agrees that he should make the offering. A new position, with one part turned toward the officiant and the other toward the ground, means that the answer is favorable once more. In case of doubt or failure, the process is repeated as many as three times.

Stones are also used as intermediaries for divination. On
● [412] top of a flat stone -- usually one used for crushing condiments [137] is placed another stone, also flat but smaller. After having reflected deeply upon the object of his inquiry, the diviner holds the smaller stone with his fingertips and guides it slowly over the surface of the larger stone. He then interprets any slight resistance that developes as the smaller stone is moved around.

There is another method very similar to the one just described. The diviner places a gourd filled with water on some kind of rag or straw crown which water-carriers, in particular, place on their heads beneath the vessel to be carried. He rocks the gourd gently to and fro and then, as before, interprets the resistance produced.

b. Pottery

323 Pottery is entirely fashioned and fired by the women of the blacksmiths' caste, masters of the fire. The modelling is done in two ways, either by hollowing a mass of clay with the aid of a cylindrical stone (2), or by rolling a cylinder of clay around a mold. The

2. M. Griaule, Masques dogons [Dogon Masks].

[531]

decoration is generally a double line of chevrons imprinted around the neck and the foot by the potter's twisted bracelet. The firing is done in the open air over a wood fire.

c. The Forge

326 Wood, iron, metals in general, are fashioned by the blacksmiths. The blacksmith's workshop and the objects he makes are simple, but they are rich in symbolic representations. "The forge represents the artisan: the furnace is his body, the bellows his testicles, the blast pipe his penis, the fire his head. When the red-hot iron is beaten by the hammer, which symbolizes the universe, the sparks are the lightning and the thunderbolt." (3) With his

3. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

rudimentary tools spread on the ground under a shelter, the artisan forges all farming instruments, the principal one being the hoe. The 412 hoe, [97] according to its shape, is considered to be male or female. 831 The female hoe has a short handle with an ovoid swelling at the end, [801] into which sticks the point of an iron triangle. The three sides of this triangle are three arcs of a circle; three, symbol of masculinity, represents here the clitoris, the male principle which sustains the [773 241] double, the dya, of the woman. (According to myth, it was with the aid of this part of the body that the first being of female sex inaugurated agricultural labors.) The male hoe has a slightly trapezoidal iron part which is attached to the handle in the same manner. The four sides symbolize the femininity of man sustained by the prepuce. Thus,

412 831 the peasant digs with the male hoe and covers with the female hoe; the work done with the female double of the peasant and the male double of the wife symbolizes the sexual union. (1)

1. M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, "L'agriculture des Bozo," [Bozo Agriculture] Journal des Africanistes [Ed., Journal de la Société des Africanistes, 1949.]

d. Basketry

285 Basketry is done by everyone, men and women; it plays a large part in the construction and furnishing of the house. Sometimes the lofts are immense baskets, woven on the diagonal. In certain regions a great mat is wrapped around the exterior wall of the round hut. The doors of mud huts are often coarse mats woven diagonally [531] which are placed before the opening. But much finer mats, made from fibers of different colors and with geometric designs with a symbolic meaning, cover the ground for sitting or sleeping.

e. Weaving, Clothes, Ornaments

291 [824] The first article of clothing was the fiber skirt made from the nyama (Bauhinia reticulata, or Bauhinia thonningii) and the covering for the sexual parts which are still worn during religious ceremonies.

[773] Mythology designates cotton as the first fiber to be woven.

286 Weaving is one of the most widespread techniques. Cotton, spun by the women, is woven by the men, in olden times by the captives, who work in the open air near the huts, in the shade of trees in the courtyards or in the public places. A primitive loom made of four vertical wooden parts connected by horizontal shafts and driven by pedals weaves long bands. The warp and woof form a ground stich and symbolize a being of intelligence and eloquence. Moreover, a science of the bands exists which is based on the symbolism of colors, designs, and numbers.

822 The Bambara distinguish three fundamental colors: white, red, and black. Each of these three tints has its history and its role

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traditions plastiques de l'Afrique noire
[Variety and Unity of the Plastic Art Traditions of Black Africa].

532 A great variety of wood (4) is available to the sculptor, who

4. Passim, H. Lavachery, "L'art noir d'Afrique et son destin" [Negro Art of Africa and its Destiny], Présence africaine.

chiefly uses fine-grained species whose fibers are not very sensitive, and who avoids woods that are too hard and too dense. The artist [412] works with green wood, generally with an adze, or chip-axe, which probably is derived from the hoe. This instrument serves for rough chipping the mass and for establishing the secondary volumes; it gives the statue a singular "faceted" aspect. The work is completed [412] by means of a knife and gouges. A skillful technique makes it possible to give the wood a patina; it is blackened by burying the pieces in certain types of mud, by being immersed in palm oil, and daubed with lampblack. The wood is reddened by applying plasters made by grinding barks and making pastes from them. The objects so treated are [105] lengthily polished with skins and take on the sombre, brilliant aspect of old bronzes. The patina of the pieces is an important element of their beauty.

The art observes stylistic conventions, such as the deformation of normal appearances. In the structure of the mass, convention regulates the proportion of the parts, of the solid portions and the hollows; it regulates the development of the secondary volumes and of the surfaces of the different planes, their extent and their lines of contact. In its volume, the statuary obeys an almost immutable canon: to a cylindrical trunk is attached a head that is enormous in proportion to the other members, which are confined to narrow limits; the lower members are much shorter than in nature. The oversized head is a convention related to ancestor worship. The head is sculpted in concave style, and the entire figure is subordinated to a marked geometrization.

321 The blacksmiths also work gold by using the "lost wax"
531 method, or by hammering, embossing anf fixing thin leaves of gold,

787 With the same equipment the diviner sometimes operates differently. Setting the gourd firmly on the crown that supports it, he then taps it two or three times with his middle finger. Then, it is claimed, he can hear special sounds, which are revelations by the water-spirit and which he alone can understand.

In short, there is an endless number of divining practices and here, if anywhere, the old saw which says that the spirit blows where, when and how it listeth, is singularly appropriate. And nothing is more accommodating than human credulity. It [198] goes without saying that there are some remarkable ventriloquists among the Bambara, who give such talented support to inanimate objects that the latter become veritable oracles. A piece of horn stuck into the ground or a mute block of wood are thus transformed through such artifice into mediums that answer anyone on any subject.

[828] [154] There are also many highly suggestible individuals who readily fall into wakeful or hypnotic states, during which they reveal hidden things.

787 763 Another practice among the Bambara is the use of the kolon' kala (1) which is specially amenable to hypnotic sugges-

[412]

1. This is the wooden pestle used in all native kitchens to crush grain and condiments.

tion. When a suspicious death requires search for a murderer, the corpse is often used for the discovery. It is carried on the heads of [138] two impressionable young men, who are then assumed to be possessed by the soul of the deceased. The lugubrious remains are rapidly borne through the settlement or the countryside, disregarding obstacles, until it finally stops of itself at a spot where the murderer or some revelatory sign is to be found.

787 A kind of effigy is often used instead of a corpse. This is made of a kolon' kala to which is tied a little bag containing bits of the body (finger-nails, hair, etc.) and which is wrapped in a cloth. The effigy plays the role of the corpse.